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'Great Places Forum' hears several ideas for Fairfield

Review board is looking for bold and creative concepts

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FAIRFIELD — Fairfield residents are responding to the call for Iowans to be "bold, innovative and entrepreneurial" as part of an initiative launched by Gov. Tom Vilsack in January.

The program, called "Iowa Great Places," is a way, said Vilsack, to transform the state into a magnet for tourism and new business. It is also a call, he says, to the state government to become "a true partner with the people of Iowa."

A "Great Places Forum," sponsored by Creative Fairfield was held this week at the Fairfield Public Library featuring Anita Walker, the director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs.

Fairfield is one of a handful of communities in the state connected to the Great Places project and several initiatives were presented by a coalition of groups in the community.

Several ideas were presented including the proposed Fairfield Cultural District designation and "Barns at the Crossroads," referring to the restoration of the Loudon barns and

heritage in Jefferson County.

Burt Chojnowski, a member of the Iowa Cultural Coalition and Creative Fairfield, said the Great Places concept is a "one stop shop in state government with 18 participating agencies that are making themselves available as coaches to help communities facilitate Great Places designations."

Communities around the state are applying to be one of three designated pilot projects as a great place designation, said Chojnowski.

Applications are due in the fall and the review board is looking for bold and creative concepts, initiatives that can show strong term results and Fairfield is an area with a huge advantage, said Chojnowski.

"Blended together, we could end up with four or five great places, or just turn the city of Fairfield into a Great Place because of the myriad of cultural, economic and historic initiatives that are currently taking place," he said.

Walker said Fairfield is an example of one of Iowa's most creative communities, said Chojnowski.

"She gets completely energized when she comes here," he said.

Chojnowski said the application process is much like submitting a grant, and will include a lot of work over the next three months.

A state Great Places team, made up of 18 state agencies,

will receive invitations by July 1 from places that want to pursue the initiative.

Throughout July and August, Great Places "coaches" will be assigned to work with the places to get their offers ready for presentation in September. By Oct. 1, a citizen advisory council appointed by Vilsack will select three pilot Great Places.

The Iowa Legislature recently renewed legislation making Iowa only the second state in the nation with a Cultural District Program.

There are now 90 cultural districts nationwide. The Legislature also created a signage program to mark National Historical Landmarks and Cultural and Entertainment Districts.